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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000383

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SUBJECT: U.S. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE WISNER'S MEETING WITH
MACEDONIAN PRESIDENT CRVENKOVSKI

REF: SKOPJE 373

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During a tete-a-tete meeting April 13 in Skopje, President Crvenkovski gave Amb. Wisner his assessment of Serbian President Tadic as "pragmatic" in dealing with Kosovo status issues, while characterizing Serbian PM Kostunica as unlikely to compromise and more likely to walk out of the status talks, call for a referendum, and then call for early elections. Complaining that Belgrade lacks strong leaders who can prepare the Serb public for independence as the likeliest status process outcome for Kosovo, Crvenkovski suggested a UN decision on future status that would appeal to neither side, while at the same time ensuring that neither party fully rejected the outcome, might cut through the Gordian knot.

¶2. (C) Crvenkovski said some Serb leaders supported independence for Kosovo provided the breakaway province did not receive a UN seat, which they probably thought would allow Belgrade to tell the public that Kosovo had not received full independence. Wisner argued that the U.S. aims for a Kosovar state with full attributes and responsibilities. The President told Wisner that both Tadic and Kostunica were trying to be more nationalistic than the opposition Serbian Radical Party; it was therefore unlikely that anything could induce leaders in Belgrade to level with the public about Kosovo's future status. Wisner asked Crvenkovski to continue regular contacts with Tadic and Kostunica, and to urge them to take a more constructive approach toward the final status process and its inevitable outcome. End Summary.

WISNER-CRVENKOVSKI MEETING

¶3. (SBU) U.S. Special Representative for Kosovo Talks Frank Wisner met in private with President Crvenkovski April 13 in Skopje to discuss Kosovo status issues, with only the Ambassador accompanying. The tte--tte meeting followed an expanded discussion that included Crvenkovski, his chief of cabinet and national security adviser. Reftel reports on Amb. Wisner's additional meetings that day with other senior GOM officials and party leaders.

TADIC PRAGMATIC, KOSTUNICA UNMOVING

¶4. (C) Amb. Wisner warned that Belgrade was acting in ways that could have dangerous consequences for the status process, using MUP agents to warn Kosovar Serbs that they would suffer if they cooperated with the Kosovars and telling Kosovar Serbs that they would be financially cut off if they accepted salaries from local authorities. Belgrade was sabotaging the process, which was unacceptable to the U.S. How could the international community (IC) get President Tadic and PM Kostunica to stop such actions?

¶5. (C) Crvenkovski recounted a conversation he had with Tadic over dinner in December 2005 in Ohrid. He had asked Tadic a hypothetical question -- if the IC agreed that Kosovo would stay in Serbia and the Kosovars did not object, what was Serbia's capacity to handle the resulting situation, given the overwhelming K-Albanian population and the need for Serbia to move ahead on the path to NATO and EU membership?

¶6. (C) Tadic had replied that that would be the worst possible outcome. The best outcome, Tadic said, would be one that protected the K-Serbs' religious/cultural sites and property rights, and permitted continued K-Serb relations with Belgrade. That outcome also would have to provide continued trade ties with Kosovo, and a real prospect for Serbia to receive EU membership and investment.

¶7. (C) Crvenkovski's assessment was that Tadic understood how limited his options were, and that he would be pragmatic about next steps in the status process. Crvenkovski said he did not think Tadic was behind the use of the MUP agents to intimidate K-Serbs, but agreed that someone in Belgrade,

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possibly Serb military intelligence, was controlling them.

¶8. (C) PM Kostunica, on the other hand, refused to discuss independence as a possible outcome. Tadic had told Crvenkovski that he believed Kostunica would walk out of the talks and would take the issue to a referendum "with a question that would guarantee massive public support." After that, the government would likely call for early elections.

STRONG LEADERSHIP LACKING

¶9. (C) Crvenkovski said Serbia needed, but did not have, strong leadership to deal with impending challenges. Tadic did not have any real power, and Kostunica's party's poll ratings were under 10 percent. As a result, there was no one in a leadership position who could tell the Serb public the truth about the likely course of developments in Kosovo. Former FM Siljanovic would be inclined to do so, Crvenkovski thought, but his influence was limited.

MACEDONIAN EXPERIENCE PARALLEL

¶10. (C) Drawing a parallel between the challenge facing Serbia today and the challenge facing the GOM in the early 1990s when Macedonia was trying to join the UN and the name issue seemed insoluble, Crvenkovski noted that, in the end, the UN simply had told Athens and Skopje under which name the country would be admitted to membership. Neither side had been satisfied with the outcome, but the UN decision had cut through the Gordian knot. Wisner argued that all of our thinking about a Kosovar state had to be clear -- it would have the full attributes of statehood.

¶11. (C) The key to the Kosovo conundrum, in Crvenkovski's view, was arriving at a solution that neither side would agree to or accept fully, while ensuring they did not entirely reject the outcome. Wisner pointed out that the current challenge confronting Belgrade was more complex than the name issue. If a referendum were held, followed by early elections, that would stop the status process for six months. K-Albanian frustration would be difficult to contain.

BELGRADE'S ATTEMPT TO CREATE DE FACTO PARTITION

¶12. (C) Wisner said Belgrade's refusal to allow K-Serbs to participate in Kosovar institutions suggested it was trying to separate Serb areas from Kosovo in reality, if not on the map. Belgrade had to allow the K-Serbs to make a deal in Pristina, and then implement in good faith whatever deal was reached. Regular practical implementation of the Kosovo agreement would be critical; it would not suffice for both sides simply to agree not to reject the status outcome.

MACEDONIA WILLING TO PLAY CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE

¶13. (C) Crvenkovski said he would talk to Tadic again to try to persuade him to be more forthcoming. PM Kostunica, his nationalism bolstered by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), would be tougher to tackle. Wisner said the SOC was split on Kosovo, with more moderate voices in the church calling for cooperation with the Kosovars to save the SOC's patrimony and to protect believers. He said the U.S. would work on getting a "package deal" to address the SOC's concerns. Wisner asked Crvenkovski to periodically visit Belgrade and to invite Serb leaders to Skopje to "hold their hands through this process."

TWO SIMPLIFIED SOLUTIONS

¶14. (C) Crvenkovski replied that Tadic had been right in pressing for elections before starting the talks, but it was too late now to move forward with that idea. He suggested proposing to Belgrade two simplified solutions: 1.) Kosovo receives independence and Belgrade and the Kosovar Serbs receive nothing in return as compensation; or 2.) independence for Kosovo and maximum benefits in return for K-Serbs and Belgrade. Wisner replied that, unfortunately, there was a third, unstated, option: delayed status process and the use of NATO forces in Kosovo to keep the K-Albanians under control. The last was not an option anyone wanted to contemplate.

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INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT A UN SEAT?

¶15. (C) Crvenkovski said some Serb political leaders had told him they could support independence for Kosovo as long as the breakaway province did not receive a UN seat. Crvenkovski had asked them what was the point of such an arrangement, and they had not replied. His own assessment was that they wanted to be able to tell the Serb public that Kosovo, without a UN seat, would not be fully independent.

¶16. (C) Wisner said Tadic and Kostunica needed to clearly articulate what incentives were needed for them to persuade the Serb public that independence as an outcome was the only feasible option. The USG would take a serious look at their suggestions. Crvenkovski answered that it was not a question of what outcome the leadership could sell to the Serb public, but was instead a question of what Kostunica himself could accept.

STABILITY OF SERBIA AFTER STATUS

¶17. (C) Crvenkovski said that the main issue for the region at the end of 2006 would be the stability of Serbia. Belgrade's leaders would find 2006 a terrible year for Serbia: losing Montenegro and Kosovo, the impact of Milosevic's death, and having to hand over Mladic. He noted that the Serb opposition, along with Milosevic, had lost Kosovo by trying to be more nationalistic than Milosevic himself. The same thing was happening now in Serb politics. Tadic and Kostunica were trying to be more nationalistic than the opposition Serbian Radical Party. Given that approach, it was hard to see what could induce either leader to level with the public about Kosovo's future status.

MILOVANOVIC